



14th Annual
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
FAMILIES OF Blind and Visually Impaired Children
June 6-8, 2014

What: MSDB 14th Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: June 6-8, 2014
Who: Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children living in Montana!!!!!!
Why: It will be fun!!

The Learning Weekend is a creative program that provides opportunities for families of sensory impaired children to learn about blindness and visual impairment, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of blindness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Informal workshops, group discussions (parent groups, kids groups, siblings groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) is available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first come first serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two depending on the size of the family. **Participants will need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste, and make sure you bring your swimsuit!**

Children ages **birth to two** will be in the cottage nursery with staff. *Parents should pick up their children from the nursery prior to lunch and return them to the same location when they are done eating.*

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtimes. Some of MSDB finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the weekend as much as you do!

Children ages **three to five** will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include: snacks, indoor and outdoor activities including a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting). Swimming (in the Mustang Center in the afternoon) will be available for this age group from 4:30 –5:30 with their parents. The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants. Saturday morning during breakfast your children ages **six through eighteen** will be assigned to various teams (groups). These teams are designed to allow for children to be involved with peers their own age. For this session there will be several different activities including: recreation activities, crafts, some Orientation and Mobility experiences and of course snacks. Sometime during the morning session Yvette Smail, (MSDB Behavior Specialist) will also meet with the siblings and provide them the opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a blind or visually impaired sibling. *This information (in general terms, while keeping siblings names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

Information from various vendors (serving Blind and Visually Impaired) will be available during the weekend

***The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants understanding of vision loss and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for the youth with vision loss and their siblings. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to insure that everyone has a good time.

Presenter Bios

Barb Balko is an Outreach Consultant for western Montana working with blind and visually impaired children for the past 17 years. She is a certified teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist and deafblind specialist. Barb has a daughter (Katie) who is blind and is now 30 years old. She and her daughter reside in Missoula. Barb loves helping other parents embrace their role in raising their child with visual challenges.

Pam Boespflug is an Outreach Vision Consultant for MSDB traveling along the Hi-Line from Havre to Bainville and Helena. She has earned a degree of some sort every 10 years. Grandchildren will soon number four; her husband is retired and wants to travel so will soon will need more hours in her day.

Emily Coleman is a teacher of the visually impaired working for the Washington State School for the Blind. She serves students in rural areas surrounding Spokane, WA. Emily received her M.S. in Special Education through the Visually Impaired Learner Program at Portland State University. She is President-Elect for the Pacific NW Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (PNWAER). Emily manages a Facebook page for families in WA with children who are visually impaired, "Blindsided in WA." She also writes for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) at FamilyConnect.org, helps maintain their message boards, and is a member of the AFB Planning Committee. Emily is married with three children; her middle child, Eddie, is blind with multiple disabilities.

Steve Fugate is in his sixth year as a vision consultant for MSDB. He recently retired from the Navy Reserves. He has been working in the Billings public schools since 1994. He has a BA from Idaho State University, a MS from MSU-Billings and a MA from Stephen F. Austin State University.

Jane Garrison is a Vision Outreach Consultant serving students in the northwest portion of the state of Montana. Her home and office are located in Eureka. Jane was a special education teacher for 17 years before coming to work for Montana School for the Deaf and Blind in August of 2008. Jane has a Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Michigan University with teaching endorsements in Elementary and Special Education. She received a Masters Level certificate for Teacher of the Visually Impaired and completed Orientation and Mobility Training through Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX.

Todd Murdock received his undergraduate education from Brigham Young University and earned his medical degree from the University of Utah. He completed a residency in ophthalmology at the University of Wisconsin where he then spent an additional year training in pediatric ophthalmology. He and his wife, Aimee, and 3 daughters have lived in Missoula since 2001 where Dr. Murdock practices pediatric ophthalmology at Rocky Mountain Eye Center.

Kerri Norick is an Outreach Vision Consultant for south and south-central Montana. Kerri has a Bachelor's in Elementary Education with an option in Special Education from Montana State University and a Masters in Special Education with an emphasis in Teacher of the Visually Impaired from Stephen F. Austin State University. She is also a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Kerri lives in Bozeman, MT, with her husband and two sons.

Amy Wicks began her teaching career in 1988, teaching students with a criminal background on a wagon train that moved from Mexico to Canada and back. From there Amy taught English and Journalism for several years. When her oldest daughter was diagnosed with a bilateral profound hearing loss, the family moved to Great Falls so she could attend MSDB to ensure the best possible education. Amy began teaching in the VI Dept – teaching technology, Reading, and Life Skills. Amy taught VI children for 7 years. She then returned to public school, and earned a Master's Degree in Educational Technology and Assistive Technology. Amy returned to work for MSDB as a VI Outreach Consultant in July of 2013, and is excited to be working with students with visual impairments, their families, and school staff members again. Amy plans to begin her work as a TVI in the upcoming program.

Sharon Woods is an Outreach Consultant for MSDB serving infants and students with visual impairments in south central and southeast Montana. Sharon has undergraduate degrees in education and special education with a Master's in Education in the area of teaching visually impaired birth to 21. Additionally, Sharon has completed Certification in Orientation and Mobility and is a Deaf-Blind Specialist. Her passion is learning and making learning accessible to all children with blindness or visual impairments

Blind Learning Weekend 2014 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, June 6, 2014

- 4:00-6:00 Check in – Yellowstone Cottage
 6:00-7:00 Dinner – pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room
 7:00-7:30 *Ice Breaker* – this will enable the participants to get to know each other a bit earlier so they can share common experiences.
- 7:00-9:00 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their “groups” and get to know each other.
 7:30-8:15 *Parents participate in “Showdown” activity or attend an informational session with the focus on Multi-Handicapped VI (Jeannie Brown will lead discussion).*

- 8:15-9:00 *Successful Teen Panel* – opportunity for blind and visually impaired teens to share their experiences and answer any questions you may have (this is a must for the parents)
 9:00- Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center

Saturday, June 7, 2014

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast in the main dining room
 8:45 Group Picture – All Participants together in front of the big sign (each family will get a “Memory Book” at the end of the weekend to take home)
 9:00-12:00 *Keynote:* Pediatric ophthalmologist Todd Murdock M.D. will be discussing several pediatric eye conditions that affect vision with an emphasis on future treatments that are being researched. There will be a question and answer session as well as a hands-on interactive demonstration for parents of how vision is affected by several specific eye conditions seen in children served by MSDB.
- 12:00-1:15 Lunch
 1:15-2:15 *O & M Instructional Session* (sessions are repeated at 2:20) pick one (ice cream or travel on campus) All participants will have the opportunity to make and eat an **ice cream sundae** under blindfold. Steve, Amy and Pam will be available to describe the choices, environment and process and help with each step. Participants will also be able to **travel (on campus)** using human guide and white cane. These activities are meant to be fun and enjoyable. Participants will be supervised by certified teachers of visually impaired and orientation and mobility specialists (Barb, Jane, Kerri and Jane) who work with their children during the school year! Both activities highlight how some challenges of living with blindness or low vision are met with success.
- 2:20-3:20 *O & M Instructional Session* (sessions are a repeat from 1:15)
 Participants will pick the session they did not do at 1:15.
 3:30-4:30 *Parent Groups* – will be a separate group for Mom's and a separate group for Dad's. This has been one of the weekend's favorite sessions.
 4:30-5:30 Open Swim for the families to join with their children in the gym OR just some down time prior to dinner. All children will be with their families until children's program begins at 7:00 PM.
 5:30-6:45 BBQ – in the main dining room
 7:00-9:00 *Parent Panel* – this has also be a favorite of the weekend. Listen to parents as they share their story about their journey with their child. It is uplifting and empowering to be a part of this presentation (as a participant or a member of the audience).
 7:00-9:30 The kids will be in the cottages watching movies or playing outside (weather permitting). When the parent panel is over please pick up your kids from the cottages.

Sunday, June 8, 2014

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast
 9:00-11:30 Emily Coleman will share resources available to families raising a child with a visual impairment. She will also explain what she's utilized herself and what she has found helpful. This session will include an overview of FamilyConnect, a website where Emily is a contributing author. Emily will also present and explain the "Child Introduction Book" she created for families to use while interacting with new schools, teachers, therapists, or anyone who has an active interest in learning more about a particular child with a visual impairment.
 See her bio for more details
 11:30 *Sibling Summary* – listen to what you children have to say about having a blind or visually impaired sibling AND also what the blind or visually impaired kids think about living in a sighted family! Some surprises and thought provoking information for all parents.
 12:00 Lunch in the dining room and then families depart



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WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB's FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!

"I learned something new every day - even after attending five previous family weekends."

"Coming to MSDB for the Family Learning Weekend is our favorite thing to do every year"

"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."

"This weekend is worth every mile I drive. MSDB has given our family emotional, physical and a valuable education"

"It was great! A lot of wonderful connections have been made"

"The staff is absolutely incredible."

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